

The



Guide to Keeping Rabbits



Photograph: © Neil Robertson

Welcome to the Rabbit Habit!

There is nothing like friendly twitches of the nose to remind you that rabbits make fantastic and rewarding pets. For the real enthusiasts it can even become a real lifetime hobby. As Britain's third favourite pet you won't be alone and, if you are interested in showing your pet there are hundreds of rabbit shows throughout the country where you can see other rabbits, ask questions or even compete yourself.



Is a rabbit for you?

Rabbits are intelligent, friendly and make great companions; however they do require a regular commitment:

- Rabbits can live up to 10 years plus (depending on the size or breed)
- Like all animals, a rabbit will make demands upon your time.
- Rabbits need daily food and fresh water, grooming and company.
- The hutch and pen will need regular cleaning (in all weathers).
- There will be costs associated with equipment and then ongoing feed, bedding and veterinary bills.
- Like us, they can become grumpy or irritable if they are uncomfortable or unhappy.
- You will need someone to look after the rabbit when you go on holiday.

Which breed?

There are over 60 breeds of rabbit and 500 varieties recognised by the British Rabbit Council. To help you decide on the breed, we suggest that you think about who the rabbit is for and what they will expect from it. For example, long coated breeds such as the Angora, Cashmere Lop or Swiss Fox may look like 'fluffy bunnies' but they need regular grooming.

Where to get your rabbit

The British Rabbit Council has thousands of members, many of whom are breeders with healthy rabbits for sale. Call 01636 676042 for a contact name and number or visit our website www.thebrc.org.

If you do not want a purebred or baby rabbit your local rescue home has rabbits in need of homes.

Buying a rabbit

Where possible, ask to see the mother of the litter as this will give you a guide to the size your rabbit will grow to when mature. Also, if the mother is healthy, happy and friendly, the babies should have a good start and stand a better chance of making a good pet.

Check that the baby rabbit's eyes and nose are clean and that it is breathing easily and has a clean bottom with no signs of diarrhoea.

Never buy a baby rabbit that should still be with its mother and siblings. When you collect your rabbit find out which food he was fed on and continue this for the first few days to avoid digestive upsets. If you wish to change your rabbit to a different food, do so by gradually mixing the old food with the new over a course of a week.

Keeping more than one rabbit

Rabbits are social animals. We do not recommend that pet rabbits are kept alone unless they are spending lots of time each day with you. A neutered male and female, or littermates (neutered before puberty) is usually successful. Never separate rabbits once they are bonded – this will mean taking them to vets together.

How to handle your rabbit

When taking a rabbit out of the hutch it should always feel safe. Approach it from the front placing one hand around its ears or shoulders and the other supporting its hindquarters – to stop it reversing – and taking most of the weight. Gently lift it and bring it forward against your body with the rump resting on one hand and the other supporting the base of the ears, so it cannot wriggle and will feel secure.

Housing your rabbit

Buy a hutch that is sturdy, secure (from animals getting in as well as the rabbit trying to escape), waterproof and big enough for the rabbit when it is fully grown.

We suggest that a hutch should be big enough for an adult rabbit to take several hops in any given direction and be able to stand up on its hind legs.

Never stand a hutch directly on the ground, as it will become damp and rot.

A run may be attached to the hutch or can be freestanding. Always look for a sturdy run of a good size that would keep the rabbit safe and has a covered area for the rabbit to seek shade or shelter.

If you bring your rabbit into the home lift any electrical cables that might get chewed.

Cleaning the hutch

Rabbits should have their bedding changed completely at least once a week. Rabbits like to use one or more corners as their toilet area so you will need to clean out these areas more frequently, perhaps every third day. Clean and wash the food bowls and water bottles regularly. The hutch should be scrubbed thoroughly with an appropriate disinfectant (rabbit friendly ones available from pet shops) once a month whilst the rabbit is either in a spare hutch or the run. When the hutch is dry, replace the bedding. Make sure that you have rinsed everything thoroughly before you replace a rabbit in its hutch.

Feeding your rabbit

We recommend that your rabbits are fed a diet high in fibre with lots of hay and green vegetables. Your rabbit should have clean fresh water at all times, so check bottles or bowls at least twice a day.

Vaccinations and health care

Find a rabbit-friendly vet and register your pet. All rabbits should have annual vaccinations against myxomatosis and VHD. Rabbits that are overweight or have messy bottoms are susceptible to fly-strike. Your rabbit's nails will have to be trimmed and your vet will do this for you, or nail cutters are available from pet shops or your veterinary surgery. Rabbits can be insured against veterinary treatment costs.

Rabbit shows

There are over 300 UK clubs and associations running rabbit shows where you can make friends with other rabbit fans. All clubs and shows are listed on the BRC's website: www.thebrc.org



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The British
Rabbit Council

Are you interested in breeding & showing rabbits?

Then join the British Rabbit Council!

Find a new hobby, make lifelong friends and have your rabbit keeping questions answered

Benefits of membership:

- A ringing scheme to enable you to show your rabbits
- Care and showing information
- A BRC Advisor in your area
- Championship Awards
- Fur & Feather voucher
- Breed Standards Book
- Year Book with contact details for all clubs
- Articles of Constitution and Rules

Protecting, furthering and co-ordinating the interests of British rabbit breeders.

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or visit www.thebrc.org



Photos by Neil Edwards

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